AN INTERESTING IMAGE OF UMĀ-MAHEŚVARA FROM CHAMPARAN

By

Shri Sachida Nand Sahay

Among Hindu gods and goddesses Śiva and Pārvatī hold an important place. They are worshipped almost all over India. They are also known as Umā-Maheśvara and Hara-Gaurī. During medieval period we come across a large number of images of Śiva and Pārvatī in different postures. Here I intend to describe an interesting figure of Śiva and Pārvatī or Umā-Maheśvara which has been presented to the Patna museum by Śri S. V. Sohoni, I.C.S., Ex-Commissioner of Tirhoot Division and present Commissioner of Patna Division.

In Southern India four varieties of images of Śiva and Pārvatī are commonly found and they are the Sukhāsanamūrti, the Umā-sahita-mūrti, the Somaskanda-mūrti and Umā-Maheśvara-mūrti. In Northern India also we find similar type of images. The image in question is a Sukhāsanamūrti of Umā-Maheśvara, which is described as follows in the *Śilparatna*: "The image of Sukhāsana is a seated figure with four arms, three eyes, a very handsome appearance suggestive of the Rajoguṇa and of coral red complexion. The image should be seated erect upon a *bhadrapītha* with its left leg bent and resting upon the seat and the right one hanging below it. Śiva and Umā should be seated on a seat embracing each other. According to Vishṇudharmottara Purāṇa Śiva should have the Jaṭāmukuṭa on his head with the crescent moon stuck in it, he should have two arms, in the right one of which there should be a *nilotpala* flower and the left one should be placed in embrace on the left shoulder of Umā. Umā-devī should have a handsome bust and hip. She should have her right hand thrown in embrace on the right shoulder of Śiva and should keep in her left hand a mirror."[1]

The *Matsya-Purāṇa*[2] gives the most detailed directions as to how these images should be made. From these it appears that the god may have either two or four hands. He should have the lotus and the trident in his right hands, one of his left hands should hold the breast or the breasts of the goddesses. The goddess embraced should sit on the left thigh of the god and should be gazing on his face. She may be depicted as sportively touching with her right hand the left shoulder of the god, or his right shoulder or his right side. The left hand should hold either a lotus or a

[1] Gopinath Rao, Hindu Iconography, Vol. II, Part I, pp. 129, 133.
[2] Matsya Purāṇa. Ch. 260, p. 898.



UMĀ MAHEŚVARA from Champaran.
Patna Museum, Patna. (Arch. No. 10889)

mirror. The two maids Jayā and Vijayā, the two sons of the couple, Kārtikeya and Gaṇeśa and various other ghosts and supernatural beings should be depicted at suitable places.[3] (*Matsya-Purāṇa*, chapter 260, page 898.),

The description of Umā-Maheśvara as given by *Śilparatna* has been followed by Southern Indian artists while the description given by *Matsya-Purāṇa* has been followed by Northern Indian artists.[4] Hemādri also gives similar description of Umā-Maheśvara as in *Silparatna*. The present image is influenced by Northern Indian artists.

The image is in a state of complete preservation and its every feature is so beautifully delineated that the result is superb. The image was discovered in village Bhelahi near Raxaul in the district of Champaran. We know that Champaran is a famous place in Indian History, because we have found here an Asokan Pillar at Lauriyanandan Gadh. The place where this image has been found is not very far from this place. The image is made of schist stone. On the basis of the style of art and the material (schist stone) the image may belong to the Pāla period. It measures :— 2-2½". Archaeological Register No. 10889.

Umā is seated on the lap of Śiva and her right hand is shown on his shoulder. She holds a mirror-like object but it looks like lotus with stalk. If really she holds a lotus with stalk, then definitely the figure has Buddhist influence because lotus with stalk is the chief characteristic of some Buddhist female goddesses such as Tara. Then Śiva carries in upper right hand Dhatura flower, lower right touches the chin of Umā, upper left hand holds Triśūla and lower left hand touches the left breast of Umā. Their feet are placed on lotus, and below that are shown Bull and Lion, two *vahanas* of Umā-Maheśvara. An emaciated human being technically known as *Bhṛingī* is shown in between the two vehicles of Śiva and Pārvatī .The *Ṛshi Bhṛingī* is in slightly dancing attitude. This is an unusual feature. Not only this, a devotee also with folded hands and in a kneeling posture is shown by the side of the Bull. Umā and Maheśvara both are adorned with various types of ornaments which add beauty in the image. Hair dressing of Śiva technically known as Jaṭāmukuta is just like the hair knot of Maitreya and Avalokiteśvara from Visnupur, Gayā preserved in the Patna Museum. So this suggests Buddhist influence. Above the figure, in the halo two flying Gandharvas are shown and the Kīrttimukha is on the top.

Now coming to other interesting features of the image we find that Śiva holds trident in his left hand, which is quite an unusual feature. Generally we find that trident is placed in the right hand of Śiva. Further Śiva holds in his right hand Dhatura flower in place of a trident. Such figures are

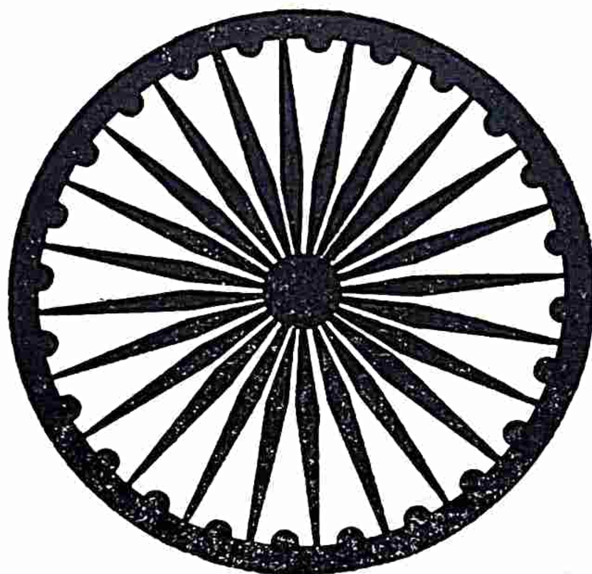
[3] Catalogue of Dacca Museum, N. K. Bhattasali, Part II, p 125.
[4] R. D. Banerji, Eastern School of Mediaeval Sculpture, p. 110.

not common. There is no image in the Patna Museum of this type. Besides these the figure as I have stated above bears Buddhist influence.

We find that the image is sitting at ease and so definitely it is a Sukhāsanamūrti.[5] Thus the image is interesting one and is worthy of notice.

// THE JOURNAL
OF THE
BIHAR RESEARCH SOCIETY

VOL. XLIII MARCH-JUNE, 1957 PARTS I & II



PUBLISHED BY
THE BIHAR RESEARCH SOCIETY, PATNA

Price Rs. 10/-